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ABSTRACT

This document describes school-based management (SBM) and examines one urban elementary school's experiences in developing a SBM plan. School issues that gave rise to interest in SBM and problems encountered by those involved in the planning process are analyzed. Two administrators, three teachers, and two parents, who were involved in the early states of developing a SBM plan for the elementary school, were included. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and tape-recorded over a 6-month period. Transcriptions of the interviews and field notes were analyzed to produce 268 pieces of data that were sorted by theme. Themes that emerged in the data and the strengths and weaknesses that appeared in the planning process are highlighted. The results show the difficulty of restructuring schools. Goals embraced by parents and teachers differed. The two themes of autonomy and parental involvement were found throughout the interviews. The school staff wanted autonomy to determine how best to serve student needs and desired protection from mandates that typically are enforced uniformly across schools and districts without regard for a given school's unique characteristics or circumstances. Parents wanted greater participation for all parents in school governance, in establishing budget priorities, in the life of the school, and in the education of every child at the school. Included are 22 references and 2 tables. (RLC)

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# Restructuring in an Urban Setting: How One Elementary School got Started

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Running Head: Restructuring an Urban School

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Restructuring in an Urban Setting:

How One Elementary School Got Started


## Abstract

One prime focus of the restructuring movement is commonly referred to school based management (SBM). This article provides an overview of school based management and examines the experience of one urban elementary school as it grappled with developing an SBM plan. Issues at the school that gave rise to interest in school based management and problems encountered by those involved in the planning process are analyzed. The author concludes by discussing the themes that emerged in the data as well as the strengths and weaknesses that appeared during the planning process.

# Restructuring in an Urban Setting:
# How One Elementary School Got Started

The reform agenda in American education during the last 25 years has been primarily characterized by attempts to alter the way teachers instruct students. By the late 1970s, it became apparent that such efforts had not netted the hoped for improvements (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). Problems in education continued unabated, including the widely noted decline in test scores (Guthrie, 1986, Hodgkinson, 1991). As a consequence, in the early and mid 1980s, the thrust of education reform changed somewhat. Rather than concentrating on the way teachers practiced their craft, reformers in the eighties sought to enforce higher standards through massive testing of students, increased graduation requirements, teacher accountability measures, and merit pay and career ladder proposals.

Initial results indicated that while some of these measures may have caused for the decline in test scores to level off, the trend was merely halted and not reversed (Bennett, 1988). As the eighties drew to a close, alternative recommendations began to attain currency in the education community. These recommendations argued against piecemeal legislative efforts aimed at patching up the educational system, and instead pressed for the restructuring of education.

Restructuring efforts vary in focus from revamping teacher preparation programs to changing individual schools. When concentrated on the school level, restructuring is often referred to as school based management. Clune and White (1988) described

school based management as "a system designed to improve education by increasing the authority of actors at the school site" (p. 1). Plans developed under this rubric call for decentralization of authority through teacher decisional participation, collegial planning among the teaching staff, flexible scheduling, and attention to student development of higher order thinking skills (Duttweiler, 1988; Michaels, 1988) and independence as learners (Carnegie Task Force, 1986). School based management is an area of restructuring that has direct impact on schools, yet it has been the subject of surprisingly little research (Clune and White 1988; David, 1989). The purpose of the present paper is to examine initial efforts to develop and implement school based management at an urban elementary school.

## Conceptual Background of the Study

Two models for conceptualizing school management are often discussed in the literature (Bacharach & Conley, 1986; Darling-Hammond; 1988). One, the bureaucratic model, is noted for rules establishing lines of authority, superiors who govern subordinates, and the centralization of "evaluation, planning, and decision making" (Bacharach & Conley, 1986, p. 642). Conversely, the professional model, as it pertains to schooling, broadens control by recognizing the need of professionals to direct and organize their work (Bacharach & Conley, 1986). For teachers, this means making decisions as the educational needs of students dictate (Darling-Hammond, 1988). These two models appear to be at odds with each other as philosophies of management. However, Clune and

White (1988) suggested that school based management might be thought of as a compromise between the two. The New Mexico/Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) Partners (1989) observed that school based management preserves features of the bureaucratic model such as the school board's retention of "responsibility for defining goals" (p. 3) and the district office's maintenance of responsibility for ensuring "that standards are met" (p. 3). On the other hand, aspects of the professional model are evident at the school level where personnel are accountable for decision making, especially in the areas of "program planning, budget development, and administration" (p. 2).

School based management (SBM) has a history of some 35 years, with more widely acknowledged activity occurring in the last two decades. SBM was recommended in New York and Florida in the early 1970s, California enacted legislation that fostered SBM in the mid 1970s, and by the early 1980s, Washington state also produced legislation encouraging SBM (Guthrie, 1986).

Definitions of SBM differ somewhat, however, the basics tend to remain the same. For instance, Harrison, Killion, and Mitchell (1989) defined SBM as "bringing the responsibility for decisions as close as possible to the school [and] defining how school staffs can work collaboratively to make these decisions" (p. 55). Similarly, a task force composed of representatives from several associations of administrators (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], the National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], and the National Association of

Secondary School Principals [NASSP]) wrote that SBM "is a process that involves the individuals responsible for implementing decisions in actually making those decisions" (AASA/NAESP/NASSP, 1988, p. 5). David (1989) noted that the essence of school based management includes "increasing school autonomy through some combination of site budgetary control and relief from constraining rules and regulations" (p. 46).

Characteristically three broad areas of decision making fall within the purview of school based management; personnel selection, budgeting priorities, and curriculum/instruction (Clune & White, 1988; Kubick, 1988). David (1989) noted, however, that decisional autonomy in these areas is only part of the whole that is necessary for effective school based management. The other part, she observed, is "characterized by teacher collegiality and collaboration, schools within schools, ungraded classes and creative uses of technology" (p. 50). Said another way, freedom to manage school affairs that does not also free teachers to experiment with the core technology of schooling -- instruction -- falls short of truly restructuring education.

Another characteristic of SBM found in the literature is the inclusion of many constituencies in school governance. In addition to the principal and teachers, governance councils often also include of parents, students (usually at the high school level), and community and business members who do not have children at the school (Cawelti, 1989; Dreyfuss, 1988; Casner-Lotto, 1987).

A number of issues related to school based management must be considered during the development and implementation process. In order to achieve goals set by a school based managed school, often waivers are needed from union contracts, district policy, and state guidelines and mandates (Casner-Lotto, 1987; David, 1989). In addition, Harrison and her colleagues (1989) suggested four other areas that require addressing. First, establishing clear goals for SBM and making sure school level goals are consonant with goals at the district level. Second, delineating decisions to be made by central office staff and those to be made at the schools, and creating a support network between the two. Third, training building personnel in "facilitation, conflict resolution, communication skills, and participatory decision making" (p. 58). And, four, developing an appreciation of the complexity of the change process and acknowledging that the change, while disconcerting and disruptive, is worth the effort.

In the same vein, the AASA/NAESP/NASSP Task Force (1988) lists a number of steps to take in initiating SBM. These steps include developing an awareness of SBM and assessing the extent to which the district is ready to move in that direction, establishing a steering committee to develop a proposal, setting goals and objectives with an attached timeline, determining if it is best to pilot the project first rather than go districtwide at the outset, training those who are affected by SBM, and making adjustments as the program is implemented to overcome small problems before they become large.

The process does not proceed rapidly. Guthrie (1986) noted that it may take a year or two to get SBM underway. Others (Clune & White, 1988), however, suggest three or more years may be necessary to before the SBM becomes institutionalized. While institutionalization is a problem with any major change (Schlechty, 1988), the hurdles of development and implementation must be cleared first. The focus of the present study is on the experiences of one school as plans were developed for SBM. Specifically, the study describes the impetus that drove the initial phases of planning at an urban elementary school and to investigate the evolution of that process.

## Method

### Participants

This study included teachers, parents, and administrators involved with a big city, public elementary school. Consonant with the strategy that those interviewed should be "people who have expert knowledge" (Spradley, 1979, p. 49), participants were restricted to individuals who had the greatest involvement with the early stages of developing a school based management plan. Employing a "purposive sampling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) strategy, the participants were selected by nomination. The first interview was held with the school principal, who was asked to name those teachers, administrators, and parents who had the greatest involvement in the undertaking. The second interviewee was selected from the principal's list and was also asked to list those with the greatest participation. The selection process continued

in this manner, with those most often nominated by others selected for interview.

As Table 1 shows, the final sample consisted of two administrators, three teachers, and two parents. All participants, with the exception of the individual from the state department, were members of a cadre that worked to develop an SBM program for the school. The principal, with 19 years experience in the city school system, had been at Devon (a pseudonym) for 5 years. The participant from the state department of education worked in a regional office and facilitated the development of a school based management program by providing training to the school faculty and administration.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Teacher interviewees included the teacher who acted as administrator in the absence of the principal. This teacher was also the school union representative and taught a class of special education students. Another teacher, who had been at Devon for three years, taught in the lower grades. The third teacher was a long term veteran of the school and taught in the an upper grades. All three teachers had 10 or more years of teaching experience.

Of the two parents interviewed, one had long-time service in local government. The background this parent brought to the undertaking aided the process of developing an SBM plan, both through the parent's knowledge of procedural matters and his/her familiarity with key people at the state and local levels. Indeed,

the role of this parent was described as "pivotal" by several participants. The parent had one child at the school and had become actively involved with the school two years previously.

The other parent had two children at Devon and had participated actively in the life of the school for five years, including former service as president of a parent-teacher organization. This parent was frequently at the school volunteering in classrooms and elsewhere. Consequently, his/her knowledge of the school had both breadth and depth.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews that occurred over a six month period. A three week teacher strike interrupted data collection early on. Two interviews were conducted prior to the strike, one occurred during the strike, and the remaining four took place within three months after the strike. Each participant was interviewed once by the researcher, with interviews lasting from about 30 minutes to nearly 2 hours. As Table 2 indicates, an interview protocol of 12 items was followed; however, when responses suggested other areas of interest, the interview was modified to explore those areas as well. Although field notes were taken, interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. In addition, materials developed as part of the school based management effort and the materials assembled for an accreditation evaluation were used.

Insert Table 2 about here

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis proceeded in three steps. First, transcriptions of the interviews, the field notes, and the documents were analyzed for significant words, phrases, and ideas. Next, information was reviewed a second time for data extraction. Two hundred sixty-eight pieces of data were gleaned through this process. The third step entailed sorting the 268 data items into categories of similar theme.

To provide a measure of trustworthiness, member checks were conducted. This involved contacting all participants a second time following a tentative summary of the findings in order to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation. This procedure was not the only form of verification used. Throughout the interviews participants' responses were summarized to verify impressions, questions were re-asked, and probes for greater detail were employed to shed additional light on the information given.

## Results

As a brief history will demonstrate, Devon was in a better position than most to pursue restructuring despite its setting in a district that was otherwise administered in a top-down fashion. Devon was a small, public elementary school in one of the 60 largest US school districts. Established in 1923, in a residential neighborhood, the school like the surrounding community had undergone much change since its beginning. Threatened with possible closure because of a decline enrollment in the early 1970s, the faculty and principal successfully worked to establish

the school as an alternative facility. During the next few years, the school evolved to a magnet status opening its doors to students throughout the city. Over time, the immediate neighborhood experienced a gradual increase in the number of families with children, rebuilding the catchment area. Despite these auspicious changes, school personnel remained mindful of the school's tenuous existence because of its magnet status. As one interviewee noted, the school competes with both public and private schools for students.

Students from outside the attendance district were attracted to Devon on reputation alone. There were no unique curricular programs, such as an arts or sciences focus, and no admission standards for entry. The "magnet" that attracted students to this school appeared to be not only a solid academic program, but also the school's atmosphere. Repeatedly in interviews, participants referred to what they called the "Devon Difference," a difference that four of the seven interviewees described in terms of the warmth and caring exhibited by the staff. This feeling was often depicted as family-like in its support of the students. One participant noted that the school is "a very child-centered place...it's not like your typical school, I don't think. You see kids' work all around." Another observed that the school has "an extremely conscientious group of teachers, very dedicated, very committed." Still another summed up the feeling saying, "there's a certain genuine caring here where people go all out...especially for those kids who are usually left behind." Several interviewees

were quick to note that the school's small size and history of strong parental involvement contributed to the warmth and family-like atmosphere. With only 400 students and 19 full-time faculty, getting to know and care about everybody was easy, according to one participant.

In filling the enrollment, students from the catchment area were admitted first, followed by siblings of admitted students, and finally the remainder of the student body was enrolled on a first come-first serve basis, provided that as close to a 50-50 black/white racial balance as possible was maintained. At the time of the present study, the school was 60% black. Students came from all socio-economic backgrounds.

During the period of transition mentioned earlier, a number of innovations in the governance structure were established at Devon that contributed to its success as an alternative school and later as a magnet. One of these innovations was the founding of a school community association. The association was analogous to a PTA and was integrally involved with the life of the school. In addition to the school community association, a management team that included the principal, parents and teachers was also established as a decision-making body. This team met monthly to define and refine long and short term goals for the school and to secure resources needed for the achievement of those goals. Through the team, teachers and parents attained much of the decision making authority typically sought by school based management programs.

Activities of the management team extended beyond the daily management of the school. For example, a committee of teachers, parents, and the principal participate in interviewing prospective teachers. The recommendations are forwarded to the school board which usually appoints the selected teacher. Rarely is a teacher assigned to the school who has not gone through the school interview. Some of the participants felt that this mechanism enabled the school to maintain its unique character despite changes in the teaching staff.

A similar procedure was employed several years ago when a vacancy arose in the principalship. Concerned that the school board had plans simply to place the candidate of their choice at the school, teachers and parents insisted that they would interview and make a recommendation. The board acquiesced to this process, and the principal placed at the school was one agreed upon by both the school committee and the board.

Another feature setting this school apart from its sister schools in the same system, was that over several years teachers had pressed for and gained certain "exceptions" to policy and procedure. For instance, the school operated by its own weekly schedule. Devon students were released at 1:50 each Thursday to allow time for faculty study. In order to accommodate state and district regulations for this loss of class time, the regular school day was extended 20 minutes on other days. A similar exception allowed for student non-attendance on the days when report cards were distributed so that teachers could discuss

students' progress with parents. In addition, teachers made the class schedule, carefully assigning students so that each would be placed in an environment most conducive to their personality development and learning style. Further, teachers sought to ensure that classes were heterogeneously composed and tracking avoided.

Some participants indicated that these innovations were not won easily and required much struggle with the school board. Yet, having successfully fought for such changes, it was no doubt easier for teachers, parents, and administrators to adopt a stand seeking further release from guidelines and regulations that were perceived as threatening to the smooth functioning of the school. As was stated in one interview, "we kind of have the basis already set for school based management,...the only thing we don't have set is control over funds and over mandates. That's what we want to really push now."

Precipitating Events

With some facets of school based management firmly entrenched, the SBM cadre had a solid basis from which to extend internal management of the school's affairs. The desire for release from external mandates had very real roots. Several participants described the beginning of the preceding school year as smooth and upbeat. The school had completed an accreditation evaluation with positive feelings and class size had been contained at 28:1. In October, some two months after school was underway, the state mandated that students in first and second grade be rescheduled to reduce class size to 26:1, in accordance with a new law.

Frustration with this mandate was widespread at Devon. As described, teachers spend a good deal of time and effort developing a schedule that carefully assigns students to class. This particular year, the effort was for naught. In addition, space problems caused for some classes to be double-housed, and the change in pupil-teacher ratio meant that students experienced a decline in services through the loss of a full-time physical education teacher and a social worker.

Several participants expressed concern over these losses with one voicing the opinion that the services of the social worker were more important than a two-student reduction in class size. This individual expressed dismay that the program could be overthrown, no matter how well it was working, simply because of a state mandate. Another put it,

> "we were not at all opposed to reducing class size, ...but why couldn't we leave it the way it was and do it next year? Was this really going to make things better? We talked about it and thought no, it really isn't going to improve instruction.... We felt violated."

This mandated rescheduling of students was the "rallying cry" for school based management. At the next meeting of the school community association, the teacher liaison brought a journal article on school based management and suggested that the idea be pursued -- it was quickly embraced. The ensuing months brought investigation into the concept, contact with a local university, a great deal of study, a survey to discover parents' concerns, and

many committee and sub-committee meetings to develop a plan. Goals espoused by participants varied, but the commonly held purpose was freedom from external mandates that the school constituency felt were not in the best interest of the students.

Goals

Although the precipitating event for school based management was the turmoil created by the mandated mid-year reduction in class size, the thrust of the SBM effort broadened. Two main foci emerged -- one felt strongly by school staff, the other by parents. Three of the four school staff interviewed saw as a central goal the creation of a buffer between the school and external mandates. The school staff did not wish to be at the mercy of state guidelines and hoped, as a result of school based management, to be relieved of many of them. These feelings generated such statements as, "we've got to protect ourselves from further violation.... We want to be self-determining in an age when it seems that more and more we're being told how to do and what to do from administration."

On the other hand, the focus for parents was parental involvement aimed at increasing participation both in the children's learning and in the governance of the school. As one parent put it, "parental involvement is a major theme here." Both participant parents talked about "home curriculum" -- instilling in children positive attitudes toward learning, responsibility, creativity, and caring -- noting that the school could play a role in improving the "home curriculum" through offering parenting

courses and exhibiting genuine interest in the progress of all of the students at the school. The parental involvement sought was not the sort typically found in schools, such as participation in work-days and fund-raisers; in fact, it was the view of one parent that such notions "trivialized" the concept. Rather, there was an overriding tone of shared responsibility for all of the children at the school and the hope, captured by Welker (1991), that "participation...would in turn promote wider senses of...responsibility regarding education" (p. 32). Toward that end, the SBM cadre developed both a series of 19 initiatives and three major categories of activities defining parental involvement at the school.

The two parents interviewed were not alone in their desire to increase parental involvement. Three of the four school staff participating in the study shared a desire for greater parental participation. It is also important to note that both parents were cognizant that participation might be misinterpreted or misused. One parent suggested that "teachers need to see parents as people who are involved in the learning process; and the same with parents, they need to rethink that, too." The other parent agreed, noting that "finding those balances is important" so that everyone can do his/her job effectively.

In keeping with the aim of a new meaning for parental involvement, another goal explicitly expressed by both of the parents and one of the school staff was that all adults in the school assume responsibility for "each and every child" reaching

his/her potential. One parent who felt particularly strongly about this goal noted, "school based management is only a tool, the relevant thing is the moral, philosophical commitment" to improved education for all children regardless of their abilities or difficulties. The faculty had targeted high-risk students as the subject of the faculty study and discussions of school based management among those forging a program included plans for improving students' feelings of self-worth, and for reinforcing those feelings both at home and at school.

Implicit in educating "each and every child" was a need for some adjustment in the instructional program according to four interviewees. One of the school staff suggested that the early grades might be revamped to form a non-promotional system in which student progress would be charted by accomplishment rather than by passing or failing marks on assigned tasks. Although only one of the three teachers spoke at length about the need to alter the grading and promotion system, this goal was strongly expressed by the parents. These participants hoped to have no failure in the lower grades, but instead to give younger students time to master skills at their developmental pace.

Both parents saw the need for the teachers to take the lead in bringing about a change in the way student progress was assessed. One parent took issue with the commonly held view that the principal should be the instructional leader, noting "I have a differing opinion on that, I think that the teachers should be the instructional leaders, not necessarily the principal. It's a

really important thing that the teachers should choose who their instructional leaders are." The other parent voiced a similar view, saying "it's a radical restructuring of the curriculum that must be made. I think teachers have to lead that issue." In keeping with this orientation about instructional leadership, the parents and the principal expressed the conviction that the teachers were the "resident experts." As the principal put it, "our teachers are the bottom line, parents have a say also, but it's the judgement of the teachers that has to take precedence terms of what's effective and what's not."

School based management most typically seeks to achieve two broad outcomes; one, decision making that is shared at the school level, and, two, a degree of control over prioritizing and expending the school budget. At Devon, teachers and parents had established mechanisms for shared decision making some years earlier; however, they did not have input into budgetary matters. Nonetheless, only two participants described gaining control over the budget as a goal. Although one felt strongly about control over the budget, noting "a number one goal would be to have control over the spending of money -- how it is prioritized and spent," the other mentioned budgetary control in passing.

Other outcomes mentioned by participants included sharing information with other schools about the successes that Devon had experienced with shared decision making. Another aim was for the business community to become more involved in the school, especially through funding special projects such as student

recognition programs. Yet another goal was to expand the use of the school. Among the parent initiatives developed through the SBM planning process, was a proposal for the school to become a community center, offering adult learning programs, evening tutoring for students, and classes for parents in such things as money management.

A last, but important comment about goals came from the state department of education participant. Offering a broader perspective from a more remote vantage point, this participant spoke of the desire to establish an institutionalized mechanism for managing the school. Institutionalization was the operative concept according to this educator. Mindful that many school improvement plans work exceedingly well while the developers are at the school, but disintegrate quickly when one or two key people leave, the state department participant saw institutionalization of school based management as a way to continue smooth operation of the school regardless of changes in personnel.

Envisioning Devon as a School Based Managed School

The participants spoke with relative ease about the events that gave rise to their pursuit of SBM and about the goals they hoped to accomplish as a result. However, when asked to envision a day at the school after implementation of SBM, interviewees often responded at first with silence. In the words of one, "it's kind of hard [to imagine] because we're already doing a lot of it." Others indicated that part of their difficulty lay in the fact that they did not expect the school one day to be magically transformed

into a school based managed school; instead, they saw the process as evolutionary and gradual.

Nonetheless, when probed on the issue a variety of details were forthcoming. Some interviewees spoke about improvements in material aspects of the school such as more computers, science and mathematics labs, smaller class sizes, building repairs, and air conditioning for the school that they hoped could be funded, in part, through support from the business community. Moving to less tangible issues, both of the parents and two of the teachers saw closer working relationships among teachers, parents, and the principal and greater parental participation resulting. While individuals from all participant categories agreed that instruction and classroom activities were the teachers' purview, they also envisioned parents becoming involved in curricular and non-curricular goal setting, assisting in classrooms, and undertaking extra-curricular activities such as club sponsorship.

Both parents, two teachers, and one administrator mentioned changes in classroom activities as a outcome of SBM. One teacher and one parent had specific ideas in mind. The teacher felt that SBM would empower the faculty to experiment creatively with varying teaching strategies, sharing with colleagues those ideas that worked. According to this teacher, the faculty would be more productive once external mandates from the district and the state were removed. Similar to issues raised earlier about goals, both the teacher and the parent who anticipated changes in the instructional program suggested that the early grades be ungraded,

with students of mixed ages working together at their own pace. Cross-age tutoring would be common and much of the instruction would be individualized. Students would often work in learning centers, and according to the parent, desks would be replaced with tables and chairs allowing for collaborative student assignments. In addition, the parent predicted that teachers would plan lessons jointly and teach in teams.

In terms of roles, clarity in the role of the principal was particularly important to some. The principal, some felt, was in a difficult position in trying both to administer the school and act as instructional leader. Three of the participants acknowledged a further conflict faced the principal at Devon as he/she tried to be responsive to the central administration while, at the same time, planning a program designed attenuate that link. Nonetheless, participants expressed the conviction that an essential element in the eventual success of their planning was strong advocacy by the principal for the faculty and for the school based management program.

What Lies Ahead

At the beginning of the school year, both administrators felt that a plan would be ready for implementation early in the second semester. Shortly thereafter, a 15 day teacher/support personnel strike took all bargaining unit personnel out of the school. As one teacher described it, "the strike really threw a monkey wrench into [our plans]." Specifically, the focus of the effort was lost. One participant felt that relationships had been a bit strained as

a result of the strike, and another talked about problems of low teacher morale. Although the state department participant had conducted a workshop just prior to the opening of school that was described by all as extremely helpful, work on the SBM plan did not resume until the last days of November.

Nevertheless, participants were able to describe what they saw as the next step in the process. Although one parent and one teacher felt that all of the teachers on the faculty had contributed to the development of the SBM plan, ideas about the next steps included such comments as, the principal needs "to meet with the faculty to bring us up to date,... some teachers are kind of confused as to exactly what our involvement is and where we are at this point." Another participant thought, we need to "continue with our workshops and study and make sure that all teachers are on board; there are some teachers who don't really quite understand...the importance of [SBM]." Still another said, "we really need to get refocused."

Others felt that plans had been developed sufficiently that work could be picked up again with little difficulty. One noted, "I think we just have to go back to the [parent] initiatives we started with." Another commented, "we have a pretty solid plan at this point.... We [need] to complete the workshops and then get into writing a program that we're going to present to the local school board and the [state] board." And another comment that came before the strike, but differed little from those that followed, was that "the whole staff needs to establish a vision of

what they want Devon to be. As the plan goes on paper, the roadblocks and concerns and needs will have to be identified and a plan to overcome them developed." Although there was concern that the momentum had been lost following the strike, several participants felt a plan would be in place for the beginning of the following school year.

Responses were equally varied when participants were asked what obstacles might hinder their progress. One respondent described the "worst case scenario" as people becoming "disillusioned and disenfranchised," noting that morale was somewhat of a problem at the school since the strike. Others mentioned the school board as an obstacle. The board had lost credibility during the strike, and some participants worried that SBM might become a political issue if it were perceived that Devon was inappropriately being singled out for release from local regulations. Along the same lines, concern was voiced that the state board of education would also be a group from whom special waivers would be difficult to obtain. One participant who agreed that both boards would be obstacles described the problem this way:

> It's a whole new concept. Will the board be willing to make a change and allow Devon to be successful, or if it does have failures, to work with that and learn from it and process the failures into success? People have to get used to the idea and have to be open to these different ideas and allow us to experiment.

Another voiced the concern differently, saying, "there's a lot of lip service that's given to school based management and the holistic approach to education. Unfortunately, there is a real strong, rooted traditional system in our local system and in this state that we're going to have to overcome." Still another described the obstacle this way, there's kind of an attitude from the board that they are "just patting us on the back and saying 'OK, Devon go ahead and do this little pilot, but don't take it too seriously.'"

Not all participants, however, saw the obstacles as external to the school. One noted that an immediate obstacle was the need to define the 'Devon Difference.' This participant saw a need for the staff and parents to gain an understanding of things as they currently were at the school and to establish where they wanted to go. Another interviewee expressed a concern that the teachers might not see SBM as a vehicle for substantively altering the curriculum and the way it is taught. In short, the SBM cadre as well as the faculty en toto needed to develop a vision of the school that they believed could be achieved through school based management.

Participants in this study were genuinely concerned that their 'experiment' go well. They were willing to take risks and to experience failures, but wanted to be given a chance to assess any failures and work toward successes. Throughout, the center of concern was providing a quality school experience for the students.

In pursuing that end, participants were willing to hold themselves accountable. In the words of one,

> "we're saying [to the state and local boards] we're willing to take the responsibility for the kids a Devon school, you don't have to blame anybody else if we fail; but if you're going to give us that responsibility, then let us try to do some things a little differently than they've been done before."

In this regard, three of the interviewees saw a formal evaluation of the SBM program as essential. Two benefits were anticipated from an evaluation. First, evaluation would serve as a barometer for the school, enabling those involved to assess the effectiveness of their SBM plan. Second, as the participants saw it, evaluation would provide feedback to the state and local boards, showing that a school could successfully manage itself and produce positive outcomes for students without the necessity of state and local restrictions and guidelines.

## Discussion

This study set out to examine the motivating factors that gave rise to restructuring efforts at a single school and to describe those efforts. The experiences of the participants point to the difficulty of restructuring as an undertaking, even when the focus is on a single school. Deciding which issues to focus on and keeping informed all those who will be affected by proposed changes are major tasks that cannot be ignored. However, even if these

matters are effectively addressed, the unforeseen can occur leaving planners with obdurate stumbling blocks.

Two themes ran through the interviews, one of autonomy and the other of involvement. The school staff wanted autonomy to determine how best to serve the needs of the students at Devon. It was not isolation they sought, for they were eager for others to know about their work; rather they hoped for protection from mandates that typically are enforced uniformly across schools and school districts without regard to the unique characteristics or circumstances of a given school. In this respect, the school staff was very much in the mainstream of current education reform thinking. The second theme, that of parental involvement, was pursued more strongly by the parents. While the parents felt that instruction was best left to the teachers, they wanted greater participation for all parents in school governance, in establishing budget priorities, in the life of the school, and, importantly, in the education of "each and every child" at the school.

Although the goals embraced by parents and teachers differed, they did not conflict and the difference was not likely to create problems. Problems did exist, however. Some of the participants had a sense that the entire faculty was not fully aware of the progress toward development of an SBM plan. More crucially, participants had differing expectations for changes in classroom operations, changes that would directly affect the entire faculty. Successful development of a plan must accommodate divergent expectations and develop consensus around common aims. Such

impediments are likely to be resolved through the process of developing a concrete sense of what is to be accomplished and how the school will operate after a school based management plan is in place.

Two important strengths emerged from the interviews. One was acknowledgement that the undertaking was an experiment and that therefore, mistakes would be encountered. Participants were willing to accept mistakes as part of the process as long as they were also given the opportunity to correct those mistakes. The second strength was the often-expressed concern for the students. The motive in working to establish SBM was not freedom from outside control as an end in itself. Rather the central motivator was providing a quality education for the students -- something the participants felt was lost in the mid-year reshuffling of students, teachers, and classrooms.

Table 1

Participant Description

| Name[a] | Position | Years at Devon |
|---|---|---|
| P. M. Anderson | Principal | 5 |
| A. B. Dillard | State dept./educ. | NA |
| B. L. Duning | Teacher | 16 |
| W. M. Holland | Teacher | 3 |
| C. C. Corkery | Teacher | 9 |
| S. A. Wright | Parent | 2 |
| O. A. Porter | Parent | 5 |

[a]To assure confidentiality, the names used here are not the actual names of the participants.

Table 2

Interview Protocol

| Item |
| --- |
| 1. What term is used to describe the change process |
| 2. What interested you in the idea of SBM |
| 3. How will the school be different after SBM is in place |
| 4. What were your goals for SBM initially |
| 5. How have those goals evolved during the process |
| 6. How would you describe your relationship with teachers, administrators, parents, and students after SBM is in place |
| 7. What in particular have you done to facilitate the process |
| 8. What is the next step |
| 9. What obstacles will have to be overcome |
| 10. When will a plan be in place |
| 11. How would you characterize the school, including relationships among the faculty, administrators, parents and students |
| 12. Who are the most active people in developing a SBM program |

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